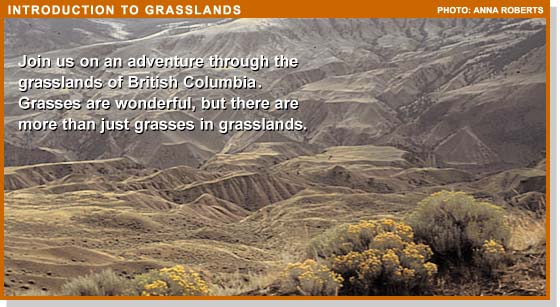
**Introduction To Grasslands**



What image comes to mind when you think of British Columbia? Forest-covered hills and mountains would be one; big rivers, Killer Whales, Grizzly Bears, and towering trees in dark green forests might be some others. Sweeping grasslands with few trees would probably not be among those typical images. And yet our grasslands are more endangered than old growth forests, and are home to more endangered species than any other habitats.

Grasslands cover less than one percent of the province and are generally found east of the forested Coast and Cascade Mountains. The grassland climate is dry with hot summers. Many people are familiar with the grasslands of the Okanagan valley from Vernon to Penticton and along the Trans Canada Highway around Kamloops as places they see on their summer vacation. The view from the boat on the lake or from the car on the highway in the height of summer is one of hot, dry, brown landscapes.

Grasslands may look inhospitable during the summer months, but they are home to many plant and animal species that are adapted to living where drought is common, summers are long and hot, and winters are cold and relatively dry.

Perennial grasses often have large roots systems to access limited water in the soil. Some grassland plants grow from bulbs deep underground where there is more moisture, and others grow early in the spring while there is sufficient moisture in the soil. Grasses finish most of their growth for the year by July and then start to lose the green colour in their leaves. Through the rest of summer and into early fall, grasslands turn a deep gold colour.

Scorpions, Robber Flies and Pallid Bats are only some of the many special species found only in our hottest southern grasslands, while arrow-leaved balsamroot, Veerys, garter snakes, and California Bighorn Sheep are more widespread.

British Columbia’s southern grasslands are a continuation of the Great Basin Steppe Grasslands of the western United States. Many species are more abundant in the United States and are at the northern limits of their range in our grasslands. Some grasslands species are found nowhere else in Canada.